ALPHONSUS, EMPEROR OF GERMANY. REPRINTED IN FACSIMILE FROM THE EDITION OF 1654

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EMPEROR OF GERMANY

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WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES
BY
HERBERT F. SCHWARZ

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PREFACE

THE text of this edition of *Alphonsus, Emperor of Germany*, is a reproduction in facsimile of a copy of the original edition designated British Museum copy 644 d. 50.

In the introduction no attempt has been made to solve the vexed questions of authorship and of date—questions that have been so ably discussed by others—but the endeavor has been to bring the play into relation with certain tendencies of the Elizabethan and Jacobean age.

In the notes appended to the volume the purpose has been to draw as largely as possible upon the records of contemporary travellers for the elucidation of the references made by the dramatist to conditions characteristic of the Germany of his day. To the praiseworthy pioneer work of Elze and to the scholarly investigations of Professor Parrott any one who attempts to bring out this play must necessarily be under special obligations. For the quotations frequently made from the edition of the former and for the guidance that the edition of the latter has been in connection with the comments on the text the writer wishes to express his deep indebtedness. The writer takes this opportunity, too, of recording his warm appreciation of the help which certain suggestions, made by his wife, have been to him.

The eminently satisfactory text that Professor Parrott has prepared in his collected plays of Chapman must render the attempt by another to further reconstruct the play a futile task. The present edition contains, therefore, only a very few text emendations, and these have been necessarily relegated to the notes.

H. F. S.

December 1, 1912.

INTRODUCTION

In his *Literary Relations of England and Germany in the Sixteenth Century*, Herford makes the statement (p. 171) that "the score or so of early plays which profess to be founded on German history treat it with an open contempt much beyond what is demanded by the exclusive pursuit of scenic effect. Historic truth is not subordinated to dramatic truth but simply ignored." After characterising *Alphonsus of Germany* as "a crude and sanguinary travesty of an imperial election dispute in which the chief interest attaches to a wholly mythical love affair," he goes on to say that "the play is nevertheless probably the least unhistorical of the whole group."

The plot evolves out of the contention of Alphonso X of Castile and Richard, Earl of Cornwall, aspirants, during the *Interregnum* of the thirteenth century, to the crown of the Holy Roman Empire. The *dramatis personæ* include a large number of historic figures, but the plot and the interpretation of character are for the most part at variance with the record of history. Alphonsus, who in the play is depicted as a monster of iniquity, was an inoffensive monarch who never entered the land over which the dramatist would have us believe he established so bloody a rule. The partisan alignment credited to the different Electors does scant justice to the stand they actually took. Prince Edward (later Edward I of England) never placed foot upon the soil of Germany and thus escaped the charms of

the German maiden to which in the play he succumbs so completely. Both the lives and the deaths of the principal characters were, in short, radically different from what a reading of the drama would lead one to suppose.

As an offset to the liberties which he takes with the events of history, the dramatist preserves, with rather exceptional fidelity, social customs and political institutions peculiar to the Empire.

If the play fails to render accurately the spirit of the age in which the action is laid, it indicates, though in an exaggerated manner, the violence and the trickery of the period in which it was written. Although it would be a libel to assert, without some modification, that the play taken as an entity illustrates the temper of those times, several incidents of brutality and craft that find place in it have their parallels, more or less close, in the history of the day. To attempt to identify the events or allusions in this drama with any one of these parallels would be hazardous, and yet, after a review of the evidence, the conclusion seems legitimate that the violence and intrigue of the Elizabethan age find their magnified reflection in *Alphonsus of Germany* and in dramas of that type. To the substantiation of this contention this brief introduction is devoted.

The first five maxims which Lorenzo impresses upon his willing pupil (see pp. 3–5 of the play) are, as Meyer has pointed out in *Machiavelli and the Elizabethan Drama*, more or less close renditions of precepts contained in Gentillet's *Discours sur les Moyens de bien gouverner. . . . Contre Nicholas Machiavel.* Of the sixth maxim:

> "Be alwaies jealous of him that knows your secrets,
> And therefore it behooves you credit few;
> And when you grow into the least suspect,
> With silent cunning must you cut them off,"

Meyer (*Machiavelli and the Elizabethan Drama*, p. 136) says: "This is not to be found exactly as stated either in Machiavelli or Gentillet, but must have been perverted by the dramatists from *Principe*, 23." The last two lines of the sixth maxim are deserving of special attention. The murder of an accomplice or of one cognisant of some secret the betrayal of which would be costly, is not infrequent in the Elizabethan drama. What is worthy of emphasis is that it was apparently not exceptional in the history of that age. For instance, some of those who had a hand in the assassination of Darnley had to be rendered safe, to prevent their making revelations implicating others. One of them who wandered about in the dark, professing his guilt, was seized and thrust into prison. Another, from whom betrayal was feared, was knocked over the head and buried out of the way (Froude, *History of England from the Fall of Wolsey to the Defeat of the Spanish Armada*, vol. xi, p. 42). According to Weldon (*Court and Character of James I*, p. 23) when Sir Gervase Elwaies, Lieutenant of the Tower, learned of the design of Weston against the life of Overbury, he attempted, and at the time succeeded in, dissuading him from so foul a deed by stating among other things that "so many personages of honour would never cabinet such a secret in his breast, that might ruin them," thereby making Weston sensible of the dangers he ran. It was no uncommon thing in those days, "the game being bagged," as Lord Castlemaine expresses it, "to hang the spaniel which caught it, that its master might not appear."

Having delivered himself of the sixth maxim above quoted, Lorenzo, to teach his pupil by example, relates how he sent Julio Lentulus to his grave with a poison that the latter had entrusted to him. The particular

virtue of this poison is that "it is twenty days before it works." Lorenzo has another poison, which "kills suddenly," and it is this poison which Alphonsus, who has profited by the nefarious teachings of his secretary, uses in killing the latter. In Act III, Alphonsus, after having drunk to the King of Bohemia, puts poison into the beaker. Bohemia, unaware of the treachery of the Emperor, drinks the poisoned draft. Later there is allusion to the fact that "in twenty hours" this poison will not work, a statement which has prompted Elze, somewhat arbitrarily, to identify it with the poison that Lorenzo had in his possession and to change the reading of the line in Act I from "twenty days" to "twenty hours." But slow-working poisons, as well as those that "killed suddenly," are referred to in the Elizabethan age. In 1579, for instance, there appeared before Don Bernardino in London a youth who claimed that he had a poison which, if applied to the lining of a man's hat, would dry up his brain and cause his death in *ten* days. He was ready, if the Ambassador approved, to try its power on the Prince of Orange. Although Don Bernardino had no great faith in the successful issue of the attempt, he nevertheless gave the youth his blessing and sent him on his evil mission (Froude, *History of England from the Fall of Wolsey to the Defeat of the Spanish Armada*, vol. xi, p. 590). The efficacy of this method of poisoning may be doubted. And yet it is in order to point out that in *The White Devil* (Act V, sc. 2) Lodovico sprinkles Brachiano's beaver with a poison, and Brachiano in the next scene, feeling the effects of the poison, exclaims:

> "O, my brain 's on fire!
> The helmet is poisoned."